

Trainers Prepare Aspiring Drug Dogs

For A Life Sniffing Out Crime

Reported by: [Sarah Hopkins](#)

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HAGERSTOWN, MD - They're on their way to becoming top dog, but for now they're still pups.

In the beginning it's mostly fun and games for dogs at the Canine Training Unit; trainers get the dogs adjusted to using their noses.

Before long they'll be joining last year's litter on the job.

You may have seen them in action, but have you wondered how they got there?



Maryland's second litter of home-grown pups were born in December, and they're being housed at the K-9 unit at Maryland Correctional Institution-Hagerstown.

There were 10 dogs in the litter. Before they were three months old the trainers picked half to go on for training and half to go up for adoption.

“When we get a litter, we immediately start taking notes,” said Major Peter Anderson, one of the dog trainers.

“You throw a ball underneath a table and he's got to go underneath a chair to get it. A chair moves and it doesn't freak him out,” explained trainer Rodney Jordan.



The puppies eat on a metal grate to get their paws used to the feeling. They also visit the prison to get them used to the slick floors, the mechanical doors and loud noises.

Toys are also training tools. For now, it's a towel saturated with the scent of marijuana.

Later they'll learn to locate the drug itself. In six months they'll start puppy boot camp. It's a 10-week training course that's intense for dogs and handlers.

“Watching them learn, watching your puppies hit the street, having their first drug find, or have their first big drug bust, that's a lot of fun,” Jordan added.

Last year's litter started work in March in prisons across the state. So far they've made 11 drug finds and four arrests.

The program is the first and only program in the nation to raise and train drug-sniffing dogs from birth.

Officials estimate it saves more than \$50,000 a year to raise the dogs and train them as they go rather than buying them.